



## Apprenticeship and Construction Training

# *Enjoying Life's Journey*

*"The trail is the thing, not the end of the trail. Travel too fast and you miss all you are traveling for."*

**-- Louis L'Amour**

The trail is definitely the thing for Don Havens. In his personal career trail, he's put in a lot of mileage, rounded numerous curves, negotiated his fair share of bumps, experienced adventure, and learned the lessons of life's road. And he paces himself so he doesn't miss all the opportunities along the way.

That's what led him to DWE nearly 14 years ago -- an opportunity to improve the trail for future generations of electricians, plumbers, HVACR workers, and other crafts people. Don's earlier "travels" in heavy industry and residential construction throughout the South plus five years of teaching heating and air conditioning at Metropolitan Career and Technical Center gave him the street smarts he needed to head up the apprenticeship and construction training program at DWE.

One of his milestones at DWE was getting the Construction Industry Craft Training Education Program approved by the General Assembly in 1999. Don helped steer the bill through the Legislature, getting a commitment of \$850,000 a year. Geared to help the state's construction industry develop the competency and skill level of employees, the program provides funding for such things as curriculum, training equipment, supplies, and materials.

While he's enjoyed his stay with DWE, Don says there are still roadblocks to overcome. Perhaps the biggest obstacle is the prevailing notion that all students must go to college. Don says too many high school counselors and parents convince students they have to go to college to succeed. Rather than preparing the students for success, they may be setting them up for failure. Many of those former students can be found in apprenticeship programs where they are discovering the best path for their life.

The average age of apprentices in Arkansas today is 23. In addition to those people who tried college, other apprentices have worked at various entry-level jobs before turning to a satisfying career in one of the construction crafts. "I have electricians and plumbers who make three times what some college graduates make," Don adds. And they're happy with the trail they've chosen.

Don is proud of his stay at DWE. "We're probably the premier apprenticeship state of anybody," he says. What sets Arkansas apart is that it is the only state that ties mandatory training to the apprenticeship. Whereas other states expect an apprentice to learn on the job, Arkansas requires apprentices to attend approved classes in addition to on-the-job training. For instance, plumbing apprentices must complete 160 hours of class per year for four years in addition to working in the craft. While such requirements place a greater load on the state apprenticeship program, they also provide the state with crafts people who are knowledgeable, highly skilled, and prepared to embrace any challenge on life's road.

